

Hot Weather Doesn't Mean the Fish Quit Biting

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A few years back I decided to start guiding more in the three summer months. I used to just guide for crappie and take the summer off. I could always catch fish in the heat so I thought why not get some of my clients in on it.

The hard fighting white bass is a fan favorite to anyone that likes a good fight and plenty of fillets to take home. Lake Shelbyville my home lake actually has so many of these hard fighting, great tasting fish that there is no limit on them, size or creel number. We get coolers full before lunch. I have had two hundred fish days and plenty of them.

During the winter months I give seminars all over the state and always bring up the white bass trips during the summer. This is the perfect way to get a kid hooked on fishing and with school out for the summer why not give them a memory they will talk about the rest of their lives.

Before you can understand just how you catch so many first you need to know just how to hunt for them. Hunt is the key word. Crappie are very predictable during the early ice-out and pre-spawn to spawn season. Just find wood and the correct depth.

White bass however is a different story. Wind and baitfish movement has everything to do with a successful outing. The one constant is a huge flat. A flat is slow tapering bank that might extend half way across the lake before it drops off into a channel or any sharp drop-off.

White bass roam on these flats all summer but especially in the early part of summer. A long about the last week of July the lake will get a thermo cline set up and that means the oxygen in the shallows has to be fed by wind or the fish will suspend out over deep water in the thermo cline or on Lake Shelbyville it is usually about 16 to 20 feet. The fish will be on the sharp drop of the flat but they will also be suspended a hundred feet or so at the same depth out over the deep basin or river channel.

I crappie fish from mid March up until early June then I start my hunt for the whites. I start my season shallow up on good feeding flats. I have several that I use. I let the wind tell which ones I will use that day. I also remember the wind from yesterday, as there will still be fish holding in these areas.

Since we are fishing shallow and I want to imitate baitfish I go with either a two-jig rig or two jigs on same main line tied a foot above the other. Either two eighth ounce or two quarter ounce with a twister tail or a Charlie Brewer slider on the jigs. Quarter-ounce if I am retrieving very fast. Just hold your rod up at one o'clock and reel the lures just under the surface. My other search lure is the small chrome and blue colored Gayblade. All of these rigs I can throw a mile. I use six-pound mono over braid as it comes off small diameter spools better.

It is mid July and all of August and most of September that I really like fishing for the white bass. The surface temps have warmed up and shallow activity is minimal. The whites will set up deep on a river channel and pretty much stay there for a couple of months. I look for huge schools of baitfish on my down sonar and my side-imaging. That is all I need. You find food you find white bass.

For this deeper pattern I keep it very simple. I use a drop-shot rig or a half-ounce weight on bottom and a small live bait hook tied a foot and a half or so above the weight. Get tons of minnows as we normally go through fifteen to twenty dozen. I instruct my clients that you don't need to throw this rig a mile as the school is right under us. You can simply open the bail and let it go to bottom or make a short cast about twenty feet from the boat and let your bait swing down through the school. Rarely does your offering get to the bottom.

The second rig is a seven-eighths ounce Bomber Slab spoon either white or chrome and blue. I use a barrel swivel so line twist is kept minimal. The next is my little secret. I use a dressed treble hook or a treble with some white buck tail tied on. I tie this about a foot above the spoon. I normally am the one throwing this rig

as it is on a bait caster with twenty-pound mono. This started out as my search lure to stay on top of the whites as the school will move twenty feet or so on you without notice. It has turned into my buffalo catching machine. Shelbyville's huge and I mean huge buffalo spend the summer living under the schools of white bass. My clients and I can normally get anywhere from half dozen to as many as twenty on a single outing. They always bite no matter what. Wind, heat, and wave action nothing seems to daunt this pattern. These fish average fifteen to thirty pounds with some pushing forty.

This has become so popular amongst my regular clients that all my buddies can't believe that I am guiding for a so-called trash fish. It has become so popular that we are going to come out with a DVD of how we do this to add to the collection of DVD's on my website that are already available.

I truly have a ball with the buffies as we call them and they always leave you with a huge splash as we release them. Some of my clients actually love the taste of them so we keep a few for cleaning. Last summer just from nine fish we got just over eighteen gallon zip lock bags of boneless fillets. That is a ton of meat.

I have many pictures on my website with kids holding them as in my picture albums. I have some with fish nearly as big as they are. Now you tell me they are not going to forget about landing the biggest fish of their lives. I had a couple of boys turn to there dad last year and say Steve adds a whole new meaning to the word BIG FISH. They were just used to catching bluegills on a farm pond.

So if great fishing action on one of Illinois biggest lakes is to your liking then give me a buzz and lets go white bass/buffie hunting.